

# Ancient Astronauts Modern Mysteries

By John A. Keel

## SNALLYGASTER SIGHTINGS

Fortean will remember 1973 as the year of the Snallygaster. The word is a corruption of the German term *schnelle geschter*, meaning "quick spirits," and according to Webster's Third New International Dictionary is "a mythical, nocturnal creature, half bird and half reptile, chiefly reported in rural Maryland, which preys on children and poultry."

This year Snallygasters cropped up all over the U.S., usually answering to the classic description of the tall, hairy red-eyed monsters which haunted Lake Worth, Tex., a few years ago and the giant winged creature which plagued West Virginia in 1966-67. As with the legendary Snallygaster of Maryland, these critters left flocks of dead chickens and dogs in their wake.

Where these giant animals come from—and where they go—remains a mystery. Sheriffs around the country have turned out armed posses, complete with bloodhounds and helicopters, to hunt them down. Always to no avail.

In June there were 6 Snallygaster sightings within 2 weeks around the little town of Sykesville, Md. Witnesses said they were from 7 to 10 feet tall and covered with hair.

Hundreds of miles away, in Enfield, Ill., a midget Snallygaster baffled authorities. This one was only about 4½ feet tall, had a grayish body and, incredibly, seemed to stand on 3 legs. It left behind some footprints, as did the Sykesville creature.

Up in Durham, Me., the local police spent the summer chasing a "gorilla" which also left footprints indicating it weighed at least 300 pounds. Gorillas are very rare creatures. Experts estimate there are only 400 gorillas in the world today, including those in zoos. No gorilla was reported missing in Maine so we can assume the Durham animal was just another Snallygaster.

## HOW EXTINCT IS THE DINOSAUR?

Where can a 10-foot-tall, hair-covered monster hide when the bloodhounds and helicopters come looking for it? That's an unanswerable question. Some authorities think these phantoms disappear into caves (a gigantic network of largely unexplored caves honeycomb the eastern U.S.). Others contend that such animals are a form of psychic phenomena . . . apparitions of some sort.

Akin to the Snallygaster are the extinct dinosaurs which occasionally wander

across farm fields, leaving perfect dinosaur footprints behind. Police in France chased a dinosaur unsuccessfully in the early 1930s. In 1969, a dinosaur is supposed to have turned up in Texas and forced a car off the road. A year later, another dinosaur created a stir in the mountains of Italy. In 1934, a dinosaur allegedly attacked sheep around Campbell Lake, S.D., and incidentally, scared the day-lights out of some of the farmers living around the lake.

Strange aerial lights and unidentified flying objects have been sighted in the immediate vicinity of some of these monster sightings, causing some ufologists to speculate that the Snallygasters could be visitors from some other planet. But are flying saucers also dumping dinosaurs on us?

There is one important common denominator in the majority of Snallygaster-dinosaur-UFO sightings. They take place near bodies of water . . . reservoirs, rivers, and lakes. Both UFOs and the tall, hairy monsters seem to frequent swamps, too. The phantom animals could be amphibians who spend most of their time under water. And the occasional "dinosaur" sightings could actually be glimpses of the creatures which have produced the worldwide sea serpent lore.

## NAMING THE UNNAMEABLE

The late Harold T. Wilkins, a British authority on the unexplained, reportedly saw "2 remarkable saurians" in the waters of a stream in Cornwall, England, on July 5, 1949. Watkins noted afterwards that the monsters were identical to the ancient, long-extinct *plesiosaur* (Mesozoic marine reptiles). Could this distant cousin of the dinosaur still be alive and well in Cornwall?

There are innumerable other plesiosaur sightings. Bulky-bodied creatures with elongated necks have been seen frequently in Lake Champlain, N.Y.; Lake Walker, Nev.; Flathead Lake, Mont.; Payette Lake, Id.; Okanagan Lake, Canada; Lake Iliamna, Alaska; Lake Catemaco, Mexico; and even in Lake Vorota in the Soviet Union.

Apparently the Indians were well aware of these creatures in earlier times. In Peebles, Ohio, there is a huge man-made mound of earth covering several acres of land. When viewed from the air, this mound assumes the precise shape of the water monsters. "The bulky frontal portion, thin neck and long tail square with

the land sighting descriptions from Ireland and Scotland," Mr. F. W. Holiday, one of the world's leading experts on sea monsters, has said. He calls the mound "probably the best surviving dragon-simulation."

Land sightings of such animals are rare but they have been seen waddling into or out of lakes in British Columbia, Canada, and in Great Britain. Witnesses of these rare overland sojourns seem to be describing the ancient plesiosaur.

Scientists eager to explain away the mystery have tried to identify these creatures as everything from giant eels and sea slugs to sea cows, whales, and even overgrown mackerel.

## DRAGONS AND DISCS

F. W. Holiday is an outstanding scholar and researcher who has spent many long summers watching the murky waters of Scotland's famous Loch Ness, home of Nessie, the best known of all monsters. In his latest book, *The Dragon and the Disc* (not yet available in the U.S.), Holiday offers some astonishing findings linking the water monsters with flying saucers. In earlier works (i.e., *The Great Orm of Loch Ness*), Holiday labored to support the notion that Nessie was a real flesh-and-blood creature capable of being caught. But after digging deeper into the Nessie lore he has turned toward the parapsychical theory; the suspicion that the celebrated creature of the Loch may be somehow connected with the elusive Snallygaster.

Flying saucers have been seen around Loch Ness in recent years. In 1971, a visiting Swedish journalist even claimed to witness a UFO landing near the banks of the Loch.

In revisiting the many churches and monuments throughout England which feature ancient "dragon" carvings, Holiday was impressed that such carvings usually include discs and figures which closely resemble modern UFOs. It was apparent that earlier peoples believed there was some connection between the dragons and UFOs. And, as we have noted in other articles (*Saga*, July, 1973), even the ancient Chinese believed that dragons and UFOs were interrelated.

Adding to the mystery, all kinds of psychic manifestations have plagued the scientific investigators at Loch Ness. Expensive electronic instruments malfunction, cameras refuse to operate, and

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strange misfortunes haunt the investigators. There have even been "mystery men" and "Men In Black" episodes. (After returning to Sweden, the journalist mentioned earlier was approached by a stranger in a restaurant who sternly advised him to discontinue his research into UFOs and sea serpents.)



Is this "Nessie's" flipper?

#### PHOTOGRAPHING THE UNKNOWN

The strongest evidence of the existence of UFOs is the numerous radar sightings recorded over the years. Nessie has been picked up on radar's underwater equivalent—sonar. In fact, some sonar readings have indicated that *several* of these creatures are frolicking in the mile-deep Loch. Yet, like the flying saucers which appear and disappear just as suddenly on the radar scopes, these herds of monsters are elusive. If the herds come to the Loch to breed (one popular theory), what do they feed on? Such huge animals must have enormous appetites and could quickly upset the ecological balance of the lake. And why haven't any of the old-timers died and floated to the surface?

There have been about 3,000 known sightings of Nessie in this century, but photographs are extremely rare and controversial. Other monsters are equally camera shy. California's Big Foot and Canada's Sasquatch, both Snallygaster types, have avoided posing for their portraits for years. No one ever succeeded in filming West Virginia's "Mothman" (a 7-foot, red-eyed creature with wings). And even authenticated UFO photos are rare considering the many thousands of sightings annually. Why are these things so difficult to photograph?

Author Holiday suggests that Nessie is somehow tied in with the mysterious psychic world around us. It may even be that the creature is being protected by unknown psychic forces.

Each summer teams of scientists and investigators man cameras mounted around Loch Ness. These cameras are



Scientists took this rare photograph of the "wake" of the Loch Ness Monster.

positioned to cover almost the entire surface of the lake. Almost, but not quite. There are a few blind spots. In August 1968, Holiday was present when Nessie reared its ugly head for a look around. Though there were a number of witnesses along the shore, Nessie chose to pop up in one of the very few places that was not in view of the cameras!

"The Loch Ness Investigation Bureau had a camera truck at Quarry Brae," Holiday reports, "and another one 4 miles away at Tor Point. The observers were watchful and keen but they had seen nothing. The phenomenon had concealed itself so there was nothing for them to see."

Eager UFO photographers the world over have been puzzled when their cameras failed to function at critical moments, returning to normal as soon as the UFO had soared out of view. Holiday cites a number of instances in which this has occurred at Loch Ness. In some cases, the cameras seemed to work but the developed film came out completely blank. This, too, has happened to UFO photographers . . . and Snallygaster chasers . . . and ghost hunters.

#### SEA SERPENTS FROM OUTER SPACE

Whenever we fail to uncover solid evidence to support our observations of paranormal phenomena, we tend to indulge in fanciful speculation. After chasing flying saucers for 25 years we find we have no more real evidence than when we began, so we decide arbitrarily that they are spaceships from beyond our solar system. Since humming, buzzing multicolored UFOs hang around the lakes and rivers inhabited by plesiosaurs and their relatives, and the swamps and woodlands

are frequented by Snallygasters, it should be obvious that all these things share a common cause.

No one seriously contends that sea serpents are visitors from some other planet. Rather, it is becoming increasingly evident that all unexplained phenomena are connected in some inexplicable fashion. Some could be tricks of time, with the monsters and dinosaurs popping into our time zone temporarily. Some could be pure hallucination.

The reality of these things is not only unproven and unprovable, but the integration and logical, objective study of *all* these matters has been made impossible by the intrusion of belief. Loch Ness investigators sneer at the whole subject of UFOs; ufologists ignore Snallygaster reports; psychical researchers are so busy hunting ghosts they have little time for flying saucers and monsters . . . although all these subjects produce the same effects.

In the past few years, however, a few investigators have begun viewing the whole scene rather than isolated fragments of it. One of Britain's leading ufologists, Brinsley Le Poer Trench, now admits "there is considerable evidence that the UFOs appearing in our skies have some connection with psychic phenomena."

The helicopters vainly chasing dinosaurs, the posses tracking down 10-foot "gorillas," the hordes of teen-agers sitting on hilltops and scanning the skies for flying saucers, and the patient cameramen shivering in the cold night air at Loch Ness, are all engaged in the same pursuit. But they don't know it. They think they are trying to confirm some personal belief but, in the end, they are all trying to satisfy an ancient curiosity and share a glimpse into the unknown. ★THE END